DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 182 EC 300 154

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TITLE The Relationship between Cultural Background and Parental Perceptions of Functional Educational Programming for Students with Severe Handicaps.
PUB DATE 14 Nov 90
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midsouth Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, November 14, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Blacks; Cultural Differences; Cultural Influences; *Disabilities; Educational Practices; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Characteristics; Hispanic Americans; *Parent Attitudes; Parent School Relationship; Preschool Education; Program Effectiveness; Racial Differences; Special Education; *Whites

ABSTRACT

The study examined whether a relationship exists between cultural background (Caucasian, Hispanic, or Black) and families' attitudes toward educational programming for a family member with severe disabilities. Useable surveys were returned by 91 respondents out of the 103 of 337 families (31%) to whom surveys had been distributed. The 40-item questionnaire covered previously identified program quality indicators in the areas of: integration; data-based instruction; criterion of ultimate functioning; professional practices; and staff development. The generally positive attitudes of parents towards functional programming for their sons/daughters provided social validation for the "best practice" literature base in the field of severe handicaps. Parental satisfaction with educational programs was highly correlated with objective measures of program effectiveness. Among differences between cultural groups were that Black parents felt more strongly that handicapped students should not be prepared for the same types of living situations as nonhandicapped adults. Parents of sons were more positive about the curriculum than parents of daughters. The low number of Hispanic respondents made drawing conclusions concerning this group difficult. Results support individual family centered intervention programs, the development of parent awareness of "best practices"; and the maintenance of control of services with the family. The survey is attached. Includes 45 references. (DB)

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ED330182

The Relationship Between Cultural Background and Parental Perceptions of Functional Educational Programming for Students with Severe Handicaps

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Running Head: Parental Perceptions

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midsouth Educational Research Association, New Orleans, November 14, 1990.

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Introduction

When the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) was authorized in 1975, family involvement with educational professionals became a formalized component of the education system (Benson & Turnbull, 1986; Bronicki & Turnbull, 1987). The involvement of families in the education of students with disabilities has been expanded by P.L. 99-457, (1986). This expansion is demonstrated in the requirement of an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) for all families of infants and toddlers with special needs. This requirement, along with the availability of discretionary funds, was designed to assist states and educational professionals in the development and implementation of intervention programs centering around the family unit.

In the past, the individual with a disability was the target of professional focus in education for school-age students. Service delivery was predominantly behaviorally oriented and emphasized changing individual behavior (Turnbull, 1987). P.L. 99-457 began a change in the focus of services from the individual to the family unit. The family systems theory (Turnbull, Summers, & Brotherson; 1985) parallels this family-centered focus. It identifies the entire family as a consumer of special education services (Bronicki & Turnbull, 1987). The family system is composed of four components; family resources, family interaction, family function, and family life cycle (Snell, 1987). These components are interrelated and dynamic;

any changes in one component of the system affect and are in turn affected by, all of the other components (Barber et al., 1988; Bronicki & Turnbull, 1987).

With the implementation of P.L. 99-457 and recent focus on lifestyle changes versus behavioral changes (Horner, 1989), it has become very important for professionals to understand and interact successfully with the total family unit. This new, family-centered philosophy requires a reorientation of service delivery in special education (Carney, 1987) for all students. Successful service delivery will require a data-based understanding of the variables affecting the needs, resources, and perceptions of the individual family system and how those variables interact.

Demographic characteristics of the family make-up constitute family resources. These characteristics include such variables as size, socioeconomic status, cultural background, characteristics of the exceptionality, and personal characteristics of the individual family members (Bronicki & Turnbull, 1987). Family resources vary tremendously among families and affect how the members interact (Barber et al., 1988). The interaction patterns of the family influence how the family responds to individual and collective needs.

Cultural background is one of the most stable family resources, and can thus be influential in determining interactional patterns, ideological style, and functional priorities (Turnbull, Summers, & Brotherson, 1986). Bronicki &

Turnbull (1987) stated that "research has shown that traditional cultural values and attitudes continue to influence third- and fourth-generation families" (p.24). Thus, a family's cultural background can have a particularly important and long lasting effect on the family system.

Benson and Turnbull (1986) found cultural background (ethnicity) to influence families' coping strategies. It has also been shown to affect families' use of social supports (Boynton, 1987; Meyers, Borthwick, & Eyman, 1985) and acceptance of members with handicaps (Edgerton, 1984; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986). Individual family views on the implications of a handicap have been discovered to be culturally related in studies by Kojima (1986) and Morrow (1987). Morrow (1987) for example, found Asian families more shamed than American families by the birth of a child with handicaps.

Family expectations of professionals and formal agencies are also culturally related (Meyers et al., 1985; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986). Meyers et al. (1985) found that minority families were more likely to report no need for formal professional support services. Benson & Turnbull (1986) stated that cultural background shapes families' expectations of educational services.

Because cultural background can affect how families view and value personal competencies (Barnlund & Araki, 1985; O'Rielly, Tokumo, & Ebata, 1986), decisions regarding educational programming require an understanding and knowledge of the

cultural differences of families' perceptions of program components. Parents' varying attitudes affect both the types of programs preferred, the value placed on specific program components, and their expectations for the future (Meyer, Eichinger, & Park-Lee, 1987; Snell, 1987). Any decision regarding the success of a particular program must be based on how that program is valued by significant people in the learner's environment (Voeltz, & Evans, 1983). A program/service that does not result in outcomes valued by the family system is not a useful or functional program for that family (Voeltz, Wuerch, & Bockhaut, 1982).

The purpose of this study was to answer the question of whether a relationship exists between cultural background and families' attitudes toward educational programming for their family member with severe disabilities. Specifically, it was conducted to determine if any differences exist among families of various cultural groups regarding the perceived value of specific components of functional programming for students with severe handicaps as identified in the literature.

Method

Instrument

The instrument used in the study, the "Parental Perception of Functional Education Survey", was developed using information reported in the literature concerning quality indicators of educational programs for students with severe handicaps. The primary source of information was a social validation study of

identified quality indicators reported by Meyer, Eichinger, & Park-Lee, (1987). The 122 items from the study were reviewed to identify items critical to functional educational programming. These items were drawn from five areas identified in the original study: (a)integration - interaction and participation in various generic environments with nonhandicapped peers, (b)data-based instruction - principles and practices of applied behavior analysis, objective measures of student performance, task analysis and ratios of reinforcement, (c)criterion of ultimate functioning - development of functional skills for current and future community environments, (d)professional practices - strategies used by professional staff to design and implement instructional programs, ensure collaborative efforts with other team members, and promote communication with members of the student's family, and (e)staff development - professional training and supervision practices.

A total of 41 items were selected for inclusion in the parent survey. The selected items were then edited by professionals from the field of severe handicaps to ensure comprehension of those items used in the final survey.

The edited items were reviewed and ranked as very important to less important by a review team consisting of professionals in the fields of severe handicaps and early-childhood education and a parent of a child with severe handicaps. As a result of the review, one item from the area of data-based instruction was incorporated into an existing item in the area of criterion of

ultimate functioning to eliminate duplicity. The resulting 40 items were included in the final survey.

The survey used a 5-point Likert scale (Gay, 1987) with rankings of Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) for participants to indicate their responses. A midpoint of Neutral (3) was used for instances where the participant had no opinion on the importance of a particular statement. The final survey was translated into Spanish in order to overcome any possible language barriers for hispanic families. A cover sheet was added to the survey in order to collect demographic information from the participants. The demographic information collected included: cultural background; gross annual family income; number of children in the family; age, gender, handicapping condition, and birth order of the child with a handicap; and presence of mother and father in the home.

A subsequent factor analysis of the 40 items did not confirm all of the five subscales as originally postulated. However, shifts toward a single dominant factor confirmed the consideration of the results as a total score rather than subscale scores. The Chronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability coefficient for the 40-item survey. A reliability of .88 was computed.

Participants

Caucasian, Black, and Hispanic parents of students with moderate, severe, or profound mental retardation; dual sensory impairments; autism; or multiple handicaps who attended one of

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five public school programs or private nonprofit programs in the southeast and southwest participated in the study. The entire population of parents in the participating systems whose race was identified as Caucasian, Black, or Hispanic on the child's current evaluation was targeted for the study. To be selected, both the child and the parent(s) had to be identified as members of the same cultural background. A total of 337 parents were targeted for participation in this study.

Data Analysis

A total score for each participant was calculated by summing the points assigned to each response. The maximum number of total points for the survey was 200 (5 points X 40 items). Total scores were classified into the following attitude ranges: negative (40 - 99), neutral (100 - 139), and positive (140 - 200). Descriptive statistics were computed on all relevant variables and considered significant at the .05 level. A 3x2 factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) design was used to identify significant differences of the mean scores among the three levels of cultural background and between the two levels of gender groupings. An analysis of variance was conducted to determine any significant interaction between subjects' cultural background and the gender of the child with a handicap. Due to the wide variations in reported incomes among cultural groups, an analysis of covariance using income as a covariate was conducted. Pearson product moment correlations and multiple regression analyses were used to determine the relationship between the

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variable of cultural background and either individual-related or family-related variables in isolation or combination.

Results

Of the 337 distributed surveys, 103 were completed and returned for an overall response rate of 31%. Twelve of the 103 returned surveys were excluded from the data analysis in the study yielding a total sample of 91 surveys. The representation of handicapping conditions was consistent with the incidence figures reported in the literature (Kirk & Gallagher, 1983), with the exception of the condition of deaf/blindness. Children with deaf/blindness were under-represented because many were educationally classified as multiply handicapped in the participating districts/agencies.

The mean, standard deviation, and range of parents' total scores for each cultural group, gender group, and the total sample are presented in Table 1. Parents' mean total scores reflected relatively positive perceptions which support the findings of Meyer et al. (1987) that parents' attitudes toward program components and curriculum development were similar to the attitudes of professionals.

Table 2 summarizes the results of the ANOVA procedure. A significant difference was found among the scores for cultural groups ($\underline{F} = 4.12$, $\underline{p} < .02$). A post hoc analysis using Tukey's procedures (Tukey, 1953) revealed scores of Caucasian parents to be significantly greater than the mean total scores of Black parents. This analysis also identified parents of male students

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Table 1

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range of Parental Perception Scores By Cultural Background and Sex

Respondents	$\bar{X}$	SD	Min	Max
Caucasion	149.46	14.22	122	179
Black	139.26	17.58	99	184
Hispanic	143.94	17.12	114	177
Female	142.76	16.23	107	176
Male	146.33	16.93	99	184
Total	144.56	16.59	99	184

Table 2

Analysis of Variance: Parental Perception of Functional Education Survey

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Culture	2	2,077.58	1,038.79	4.12•
Sex Gender	1	1,128.54	1,128.54	4.47•
Interactions	2	705.16	352.58	1.40
Within (Error)	85	21,455.02	252.41	
Total	90	25,366.30		

•$p < .05$

to have significantly higher total scores than parents of female students. The analysis of covariance procedure revealed that the greatest difference among scores occurred between Caucasian and Black respondents; supporting the results of the ANOVA.

No significant correlations were found between any of the individual variables and parents' attitudes for any of the three cultural groups. A combination of all five individual variables was the only combination found to be statistically significant in predicting parents' total scores. Furthermore, this prediction model was only found statistically significant for the Black parents.

Discussion

The generally positive attitudes of parents towards functional programming for their sons/daughters provided social validation for the "best practice" literature base in the field of severe handicaps. Parental satisfaction of educational programs has been found to be highly correlated with objective measures of program effectiveness (Meyer et al., 1987; Wolf, 1978). Voeltz & Evans (1983) suggested basing educational decisions on the important variables of parental perceptions and attitudes. The attitudes of parents who participated in this study indicated their support of program components currently identified as quality indicators of functional programs for students with severe handicaps.

The more positive attitudes towards functional programming found for Caucasian parents could be due to the possibility that

the "best practices" components and instructional methods identified in educational literature (Donnellan & Neel, 1986; Meyer, Eichinger, & Park-Lee, 1987), more closely mirror the values of Caucasian parents than the values of Black parents. In a study of alternative lifestyles among families from different ethnic backgrounds, Peters & McAddo (1983) found that Black families held more conservative/traditional views than Caucasian families.

For example, in reviewing the responses by cultural group per survey item, Black parents responded differently than Caucasian parents regarding whether educational programs should focus on preparing students for the same or different living situations as nonhandicapped adults. Black parents more strongly felt that students should not be prepared for the same types of living situations as nonhandicapped adults. Meyers, Borthwick, and Eyman (1985) similarly found that minority families were more likely to keep their children with severe handicaps at home, even as they got older.

Differences among cultural groups have been attributed to socioeconomic differences by Lambert (1985) and Zapata & Jaramillo (1981) in studies of family values among differing cultures. The reported incomes of culture groups represented in this survey were widely varied. However, the analysis of covariance found the same significant differences even when variances in income were controlled.

Parents' differing scores for the two gender groups (sons

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versus daughters) could be a reflection of parents' differing expectations and perceptions for male verses female children. Children's gender has been shown to be a significant variable in cross-cultural studies on family differences (Lambert, 1985; Nihira, Tomiyasu, & Ebata, 1987). Higher scores for parents of male students could also be due to the components and instructional methods of functional curriculum identified within the survey focusing on activities and goals usually valued for males (e.g. increased independence). Such cross-cultural similarities between parents of male versus female children were also found by Lambert (1985).

The lack of identification of any variables in isolation accounting for a large effect on the total scores for any parents is likely due to the heterogeneity of individual families within cultural groups (Barnlund & Araki, 1985; Bronicki & Turnbull, 1987). It has been reported that individual families within a cultural group share a tendency to act in similar ways (Barnlund & Araki, 1985). Turnbull & Turnbull (1986) however, cautioned against assuming that individual families will respond in a manner stereotypical of their cultural background.

Caution should be used when interpreting the results of the current study due to the small number of Hispanic respondents relative to other groups, variability of educational programs among participating districts, lack of control over respondents' familiarity with functional education programming, and relatively low response rate.

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Implications

The implications from the findings of this study to the field of special education have considerable importance for the current move to family focused intervention. The possibility of cultural differences among families brings into focus the question, "What is to be the goal of family focused intervention?". There has been clear discontinuity between professionals' goals for families and the priorities expressed by the families themselves (Strain & Odom, 1986). This lack of congruence creates a conflict when the goals of professionals do not match the goals of particular family units.

The results of this study imply that true "family- centered" intervention must take care to deal with each family on an individual basis. The educational service goals that correspond to the personal values of the individual family unit, rather than the service goals that are in opposition, are more likely to be successful (Cadman, Rosenbaum, Walter & McNamee, 1986). Through developing parent-awareness of "best-practices" while at the same time maintaining the locus-of-control for service type, intensity, and duration with the family; the goal of intervention can become an integration of professional and family values.

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Parental Perception of Functional Education
Survey

DIRECTIONS: Your son/daughter's educational program should reflect the priorities and needs of your family. In order to reach this goal professionals need specific information from parents of students with severe handicaps about what are the important components of educational programs. Therefore, we are asking you to take a few minutes to read the following statements and indicate how important each one would be as a part of your child's program.

Please respond to each statement by circling the number which indicates the degree to which you feel it is an important part of your child's educational program.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

1. Classrooms for students with severe handicaps are located separately from classrooms for their same-age nonhandicapped peers.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

2. Each IEP includes objectives to increase the use of community services (grocery shopping, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

3. In order to be certified, teachers are required to receive formal training in functional curriculum development.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

4. The program emphasizes the goal of maximum participation in integrated community environments.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

5. The program reflects a balance between safety concerns and the need for risk-taking, based upon the students' ages.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

6. The goal of the program is increased independence.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

7. Each IEP includes objectives for functional skills to prepare students for the demands of future community settings.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

8. The IEP requires performance of skills in the presence of nonhandicapped persons in actual situations to indicate mastery of objectives.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

9. All instructional staff (teachers, speech therapists, physical therapists, etc.) teach together as a team, rather than pull students out of the room to provide services separately.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

10. The program includes planned daily interactions and activities with nonhandicapped students of the same age.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

11. Parents are encouraged to help identify effective instructional strategies (effective reinforcers) for their son/daughter.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

12. All programs (regular and special) share the same daily school calendar (morning bell, class changes, lunchtime, recess, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

13. Students receive direct training in simulated settings within the classroom rather than in actual places and settings where skills are to be used.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly

disagree agree

14. Students of the same ability level are always grouped together for instruction of functional skills.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

15. Each IEP includes vocational training objectives for students.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

16. Only the classroom teacher is involved in both the planning and delivery of instruction.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

17. Instructional programs include plans for reducing teacher assistance when skills are used i community settings.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

18. The classroom environment (furniture, decorations, etc.) looks the same as those used by nonhandicapped students of the same age.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

19. Students with severe handicaps are educated at one centrally located campus rather than in a variety of neighborhood schools throughout the school district.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

20. Each IEP includes objectives to develop recreation activity skills based on the student's and his/her family's personal preferences.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

21. The IEP states present levels of performance in terms of I.Q. scores, mental age, or standardized achievement test scores rather than functional activities.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

22. Where needed, students are provided with special communication devices and/or adaptive equipment.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

23. The instructional staff believe that every child is educable and consider the program to be accountable for student gain.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

24. The IEP requires performance of skills in the actual settings where skills are used.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

25. Students are given opportunities to make choices, provide input, and express preferences (asking a student to indicate where s/he would like to sit).

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

26. Students attend different types of schools (elementary, junior high, etc.) than those nonhandicapped students of the same age would attend.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

27. Each IEP includes objectives to develop domestic living skills (cooking and household chores).

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

28. There is regular communication (notes, phone calls, etc.) between home and school about student progress on functional skills.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

29. The IEP mainly includes objectives for learning isolated skills that are useful in school settings.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

30. Students travel to and from school using different buses than those nonhandicapped students use.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

31. IEP objectives reflect the priorities and needs of the family.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

32. Instructional settings, materials, and activities are different from those used by nonhandicapped students of the same age.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

33. Paraprofessional personnel are required to receive formal training in community instruction methods.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

34. Students with severe handicaps are treated by professional staff like nonhandicapped students of the same age.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

35. Instruction of new skills takes place in the actual setting in which the skills are used (teaching grocery shopping in a grocery store, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

---

36. Caregiving interactions and natural routines (eating, going to the bathroom, etc.) are utilized as opportunities for instruction.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

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37. The school principal has received training directly related to functional curriculum development.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

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38. Each IEP includes objectives to develop social skills (starting conversations, eating lunch with friends, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

39. Students attend the exact same school they would attend if not handicapped.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

40. The program focuses on preparation for living in different settings from those of nonhandicapped adults.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree